

Kabira Khada Bazaar Mein

**A Call for Local Action in the
Wake of Global Emergency**

T. Vijayendra

Ecologise Hyderabad

KABIRA KHADA BAZAAR MEIN:

A Call for Local Action in the Wake of Global Emergency

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*Kabira Khada Bazaar Mein,
Liye lukathi haath.
Jo ghar phunke aapanou,
Chale hamare saath.*

*Kabir is standing in the market place,
walking stick in hand.
Those who want to burn their bridges,
come with me.*

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PREFACE

This little booklet is primarily a call for local action in the wake of Global Emergency. We are looking at not just the global climate emergency, but a scenario of civilizational collapse unless we take timely action. It is a call for action that requires you to give up everything, in fact, burn your bridges, and work full time for this cause. It is a call, not only to reduce your carbon foot print, but also to earn your livelihood exclusively from Green Jobs. We define Green Jobs as those which involve 'Restoring Ecology through Rebuilding Communities' on the basis of 'Equity and Sustainability.'

The discussion and action on global warming, now often referred to as Global Climate Emergency, is largely about the nature and urgency of the problem and about making a protest and calling on governments to take action. While the message of urgency is important and necessary, the proposed action lacks conviction. Most of us feel that the governments around the world will do nothing until it is too late. This leads to pessimism.

We feel that local action (as in the case of Transition Towns movement, about which you will learn below) can give us good results and a lot of positive energy. This booklet therefore focuses mainly on Local Action by local groups. It also offers the logic of local action and reasons why it has been neglected.

The main body of the booklet describes the nature of the Global Emergency, the need for local action, what defines the local, what exactly is meant by local action, local action in urban areas and finally local action in rural areas.

This is followed by two smaller articles. The first one, ‘We are Part of the Problem’, primarily addresses the question of why most people, in spite of knowing such a lot about the issues, are unable or unwilling to act at a local level.

The next article, ‘Pichhoun Taan, or Pull from Behind’ describes the pressure from home and peer groups that prevents people from getting into revolutionary action. It also gives a small guide to action in such cases.

Another world is not possible (on its own?), let us make it happen!
That is all.

Vijayendra

Hyderabad,

May 12, 2019

GLOBAL EMERGENCY AND LOCAL RESPONSE

PART I

GLOBAL EMERGENCY

The industrial revolution (1760-1830) in England ushered in a new era of technological innovations and comforts for mankind. Initially only the rich and people of the middle class enjoyed these comforts. However after the Second World War, the working class in advanced capitalist countries also began to enjoy these comforts of scooters, motor cycles, cars, refrigerators, washing machines, telephones, radio and television, cheap synthetic clothing, disposable plastic etc. Of course they got these benefits only after prolonged and difficult trade union movements and struggles. In India, the working class began to get these benefits, also as a result of struggle from the 1970s onwards. Since the 1990s, many more sections of the rural middle class also have been availing of these 'benefits' in spite of the agrarian crisis and farmer suicides.

By the nineteenth century, many thinkers and scientists began to see the harm that the industrial revolution was capable of doing. William Blake wrote extensively about its ill effects. John Ruskin talked of its demoralising aspects. Several other philosophers and authors raised questions. However it was only after the Second World War that the full horror became apparent. One of the first books to appear

was *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson in 1962. The Club of Rome's report, *Limits to Growth* in 1971 was a pioneering and systematic critique of the ideology of development and growth saying that it is unsustainable and harmful to human kind and to nature.

In the 21st century, data about global warming, carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission and its relation to global warming has become public knowledge. Also the role of fossil fuels (primarily petrol and coal) as the main cause in these emissions was understood. Then came the meetings of the world governments, the Kyoto Protocol, The Copenhagen Declaration and more recently the Paris Agreement on limiting the damage. Simultaneously the United Nations brought together a group of world renowned scientists in the form of Inter-Government Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to produce regular scientific reports on the situation. At first the scientists were cautious and gave warnings in milder terms. But as the data began to grow alarming, and as extreme impacts began to hit people in many countries, this year the scientists gave a very serious warning. This has resulted in a movement for urgent climate action and in some countries climate action groups have declared it as Global Climate Emergency. Unsurprisingly it began in England, the country where the Industrial Revolution started. But there are several nations that are true pioneers – Costa Rica, Ecuador and Cuba for e.g. have taken far deeper and wider actions specifically with respect to climate change and generally on the converging crises. (<https://www.ecologise.in/>)

The Global Emergency has several aspects - Global Warming, Resource Depletion, Ecological Degradation and Growing Inequality and Social Unrest. We will discuss them below one by one and their relation to each other.

Global Warming

This has received maximum attention in the media due to the recent IPCC report which has drawn every one's attention to the gravity of

the situation. 'If we are to stay below 1.5 °C global warming, emissions have to peak no later than 2020.' That is less than 600 days from now. 'Emissions must also be cut by half by 2030, and to net zero by 2040. We need an immediate emergency response by policymakers, businesses and civil society, aimed at an unprecedented transformation of all sectors of society. *It's time to act!*'

The levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the main driver of climate change, have hit a new record high, the UN said, warning that the time to act was running out. 'Without rapid cuts in CO₂ and other greenhouse gases, climate change will have increasingly destructive and irreversible impacts on life on Earth,' The report, for 2017, puts the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere at 405.5 parts per million (ppm). That is up from 403.3 ppm in 2016 and 400.1 ppm in 2015. The safe levels are considered to be a maximum of 350, ideally less (James Hansen, leading climate scientist)!

"The window of opportunity for action is almost closed."

And the emissions have been still rising in the last two years!

Resource Depletion

Human society uses natural resources for its survival and reproduction. Other living beings depend mainly on plant resources which are known as renewable resources. The non-renewable resources are minerals, such as gold, silver, copper, iron, coal, petroleum and many other metals. They are non-renewable because their quantity is fixed and the more we use it the less there is left to use. For industrial societies petroleum and coal are the basic sources of energy and their depletion can spell the end of industrial society.

Now there is a law of extraction of these non-renewable resources. It was first discovered in the case of oil by M. King Hubbert and is called, 'Peak Oil'. It says that when half the resources are extracted (taken out) then the production will start falling. That is, the peak of production occurs when half the oil is taken out. It

applies to a particular well, to a region, to a country and to the whole world. Today, it has been found that it applies to all the minerals and scientists have calculated(<https://www.ecologise.in/2016/>) the peak year for almost all the important minerals. And, hold your breath, the overwhelming majority of them will peak before 2030, starting with oil! The data is almost accurate and might differ only by a few percentage points, but the fact remains that the life of industrial society is numbered and the end will occur in a decade or a little more. The collapse of industrial society will be a 'never before' event because that will be the end of ever increasing wealth that the human society has seen in the last few thousand years.

In the short term even the renewable resources cannot help us because human society has used them at a rate higher than the rate of their natural reproduction. That is, we have cut more trees than the number of new ones that are growing, we have used more water than is being replenished naturally, and so on. Water tables all over the world are falling. It will take decades to get back the status of 'renewable' for these resources. In fact we have been mining them in the same way that we have mined the non renewable resources.

Ecological Degradation

Ecology means the relationships between plants, animals, people, and their environment, and the balances between these relationships. In the last two hundred years and more specifically in the last 50 years, humans have over exploited the environment and poisoned air, water and soil. Global warming is one of the more visible results. However water scarcity is also a huge problem mankind is facing. Many species are endangered and some have become extinct. Sea levels rising, forests vanishing, ice melting, water bodies drying up and land getting converted into deserts-all of this is happening at various places on earth. We are facing the very extinction of life on earth unless we take corrective measures right away.

Growing Inequality and Social Unrest

As industrial society collapses and energy resources get depleted, we may very well be entering an era of utter chaos. Many parts of the world and our own country are facing these problems. Untimely rain or lack of it is causing havoc. Lack of drinking water is making villagers leave their homes and sometimes even their country. In this crisis the powerful people are cornering as much wealth as they can before a total collapse occurs, thus worsening the problem. The number of billionaires has increased significantly in this decade. The governments by and large are on the side of the rich and the poor have nowhere to go. Chaos is prevailing in many parts of the world. Hunger, suicide and crimes have increased. In some places mass protests are taking place. The world is in turmoil.

When society collapses we have only two choices - chaos or planned transition to a different future. One scenario is that chaos prevails and large scale destruction occurs and it may take decades to recover. Such a chaotic situation prevailed in India during 1707-1757, when Aurangzeb died and Mughal Empire collapsed. It took 50 years, with the victory of British in 1757 at Plassey, that recovery started taking place. Such things have also occurred in other places (most recently in Venezuela). The other and more difficult choice is to plan a transition to the next phase of history. It is extremely difficult but many people in the world are trying. In the next section we will discuss as to what we in India can do.

PART II

LOCAL RESPONSE

If the crisis is global then the solution should also be global. What can we do at a local level? The answer is that at one level everyone is part of the problem, even though the rich and powerful are more responsible for the situation. And even if the U. N. declares global emergency and governments take action and industrial society collapses, the task of recovery-which will entail restoring ecology

and means of survival, will have to be done by people at the local level. As of now practically no government has taken serious action and we have to start the transition work immediately. As we said above, *'It's time to act!'* and *'The window of opportunity for action is almost closed.'*

To respond meaningfully, we have to first understand the problem and then have a vision of a post-industrial society where such problems don't recur. Then we can talk of what action we have to take now to reach the goal step by step in the coming years.

Let us start with the problems today. 1. No alternative energy source can replace the petrol and gas which run our trucks and cars. Today, transportation is so basic to global capitalism that its breakdown alone can cause the system to collapse. 2. No alternative energy can generate the amount of energy we are using now. 3. The implication of the above is that 'globalisation' is no longer possible. 4. The present level of consumption will result in unacceptable level of global warming and ecological degradation.

Based on the above, one can deduce that post-industrial societies will have the following main features:

1. Equality 2. Scaling down of the use of resources-particularly energy 3. Local self-sufficient economy 4. Ecological restoration of the present degraded ecology 5. A value system or ethical base which is more cooperative and less competitive than the present society.

So we have to start thinking, planning and acting right now. As they say, 'thinking is not doing, planning is not doing, doing is doing!'

What is Local

Local can be defined in many ways. It can be defined in terms of human scale - number of people and the area that we can know, walk around or go on a bicycle. A thumb rule is the pin code. Every pin code in the country defines a local area. There are 39772 Pin Code regions in India, with an average population of 8221 and an

area of 21.22 sq km. So a population of 10,000 and an area of 25 sq km can be considered 'local' for India. For rural areas it can be a micro watershed or a panchayat, and for the urban areas it can be a municipal ward. Once you start thinking about it, it is easy to define your local area. And the ultimate core of a locality is, of course, us as individuals or our family.

What can I do?

So before discussing what action we should take in urban or rural areas, let us begin with ourselves. So what can we do? As a general rule, the key word is voluntary simplicity at a personal level. It is of course true that one person reducing her/his energy consumption/eco foot print cannot significantly change the situation. As the critics often say, 'if you don't use it someone else will use it'. But it does give one the moral energy to go ahead and involve in larger issues in larger contexts. After all one does face the question, 'What are you doing about it? What is your own ecological footprint?' Secondly, it can also be argued that simplicity or going a bit away from the consumer society actually gives one more time to do things. The ultimate goal at an individual level is not only to reduce one's carbon footprint, but also to earn one's livelihood exclusively from Green Jobs. We define Green Jobs as those which involve in 'Restoring Ecology through Rebuilding Communities' on the basis of 'Equity and Sustainability.'

Local Response in Urban Areas: Transition Town

About 70% of emissions which cause global warming come from cities. Rural people today consider cities as role models. So it is very important that cities take a leading role in meeting the challenge of global emergency.

The Transition Town is an idea for socio-economic localisation. Central to the Transition Town is the idea that a life without oil could

in fact be far more enjoyable and fulfilling than the present: 'by shifting our mindset we can actually recognise the coming post-cheap oil era as an opportunity rather than a threat, and design the future low carbon age to be thriving, resilient and abundant - somewhere much better to live than our current alienated consumer culture based on greed, war and the myth of perpetual growth.' The aim of transition town would be to prepare a plan to make the town fossil fuel free in ten years. As in the case of defining the local, we determine an area which could be a town or part of a town which is human scale. It would be about 10,000 people and an area of 25 square kilometres.

The Plan

The plan will have following subject areas: 1. Air 2. Water 3. Waste Management 4. Food Production 5. Energy 6. Health 7. Education 8. Housing 9. Commons and Heritage 10. Employment Generation and Entrepreneurship.

We should prepare some basic ideas as to how the future will look like in these 10 fields and we need to conduct awareness programs about them through lecture, films, discussions etc. for about one year. We will have to build a local leadership which understands these ideas and is prepared to work for them. This group can be 7-10 individuals. This group should then work on a concrete 10 year plan for transition.

The main aim would be to make the area fossil fuel free in 10 years gradually and every one will earn his/ her livelihood through green jobs.

A typical set of goals will look like this:

1. Air

We cannot live without air even for 3 minutes! The biggest polluters of air in urban areas are fossil fuel driven vehicles-scooters, cars, buses and trucks. Of these cars have the highest per capita emissions.

So we should aim at reducing car miles and expand the scope of public transport. We must create car free zones and observe weekly car free days in congested localities. On the positive side promote bicycles and cycle rickshaws and other human powered wheel based transport, such as tricycles and 4 wheeled push carts.

2. Water

Next to air, water is the most important thing for most life. All human settlements are based near water sources-lakes, rivers and wells. In fact the size of a human settlement until recently was based on the availability of water in the vicinity. Only availability of cheap energy allowed cities to pump water from distant rivers. Today in most cities every drop of water consumed involves some coal (due to electricity in pumping) and/or petrol for tanker transport. Our plan should ensure that all lakes get clean/rain water to make lakes potable, fishable, swimmable and we have to stop the froth and foam in the lakes. We must ensure that houses and roads do not get flooded during rains; to capture all rain water and ensure that all public and private buildings have rain water harvesting structures. And finally to ensure that the water table in the area rises year by year to reach 20 feet.

3. Waste Management

Plastic is currently the biggest source of solid waste and we must ban single use plastic to begin with. Then segregation at source between green (biodegradable) and red (non biodegradable) waste, recycling of non biodegradable waste and composting the biodegradable waste is the next step. Further we need to ensure zero-waste management and also ensure that industrial and sewage waste does not go to the river or water bodies. Gradually we can introduce composting latrines to save water and keep the water bodies clean. Polluting water from industries should be treated before it is released.

Harmful industries should be closed. It must be ensured that no pollutants enters the area and its lakes, from upstream or from outside the area.

4. Food

To reduce food miles, all food should be locally procured, except salt which may have to be imported from outside. Perishables like fruits and vegetables should be produced within the local area. Grains can be procured within the district. Home and roof top vegetable gardening, tree planting and fruit tree planting etc. must be promoted wherever possible. It must be ensured that no one goes hungry and free kitchens must be run wherever needed.

5. Energy

Energy audit of all energy users must be done to reduce energy (based on coal, large hydroelectric dams, nuclear and gas) use by 10 % every year. That is, aim to be off grid by the end of 10 years. In any case the grid may collapse by that time. In some places, solar thermal, wind or micro-hydel may be possible. Promote roof top solar energy both for heating water and for electricity.

6. Health

Urban health has deteriorated to an unprecedented level. We are breathing poison, drinking poison and eating poison. The last is mainly due to the junk food sold in packets and served in restaurants. They all are characterised by HFSS - high fat, salt and sugar. We must begin with a campaign against them and save our children. Clean air, water and healthy food are the first aims in health care. Then it must be ensured that existing government hospitals in the area are equipped with infrastructure and staff, as well as, take up massive preventive care so that the residents are healthy. Palliative care must be made

available to the aged and terminally ill patients. Establish hospitals ward-wise; restore the main hospital with alternative medicine wing. Root out mosquito menace.

7. Education

Education should aim to impart skills and values to ‘restore ecology through rebuilding communities and based on equity and sustainability’. Rigorously promote local language, Hindi/Urdu, English and vernacular tongues. Combine teaching of manual skills along with mental skills. Give bicycles to all school going students. Ensure that all schools have libraries. Also reading rooms with newspapers in local language, Urdu, Hindi (or other relevant languages) and English should be provided in localities/mohallas. Make neighbourhood schooling mandatory and save time, energy and money that travels to distant schools require.

8. Housing

The future of buildings higher than two stories is uncertain as there may not be power for lifts and for pumping water. Ensure that every resident has basic housing facility through low-cost environment friendly and dignified housing. New houses should be so designed that they do not require air conditioning or fans and do not require lighting during day time.

9. Commons and Heritage

Ensure that parks and play grounds are well maintained and all citizens and children have free access to them. Improve all Heritage Monuments by managing them locally and using them for public activity and recreation.

10. Employment Generation and Entrepreneurship

Promote green entrepreneurship such as rain water harvesting, waste processing and composting, home gardening resources, bicycle stands and bicycle repair and maintenance shops, markets for organic and green local products, sale, maintenance and repairs of solar cookers, water heaters and solar panels, etc. As we said above, the main aim is that at the end of 10 years everyone will be earning their livelihood through green jobs.

To begin with

We can start a few concrete activities at home or within our group or office. Obvious things to do are to stop using single use plastic, buy a bicycle and start using it as often as possible, start home composting and gardening etc. You can also do energy audit of your home and office and start reducing energy consumption. You can start interacting with watchdog committees of schools and hospitals and so on. All this is in your hands and will give you energy to go ahead in the initial stages when no one responds and it can get very frustrating.

Local Response in Rural Areas: Ecological Village

Here also we begin with identifying the problems, their solution and then plan how to go about solving them.

The crisis of rural India

The recent marches of peasants to Mumbai and Delhi have highlighted their problems. They can be summarised thus: Some 80% rural households-peasants and non peasants are in debt. Their agricultural work does not pay them enough to pay back their debts. Most of the debt is to local money lenders and not to banks, and most farmers borrow from local money lenders for urea, marriages, deaths and births in the family.

Why are they in debt? The main reason is the introduction of green revolution and milk schemes. There are many names to it: Commercialisation of agriculture, Development or Capitalist penetration in agriculture etc. Whatever the name, it has three well known results:

1. Increase in production and wealth, 2. Increase in disparity. The rich get much richer whereas the poor may earn more money than before, but they also get in greater debt, 3. Ecological degradation.

Since the green revolution and white (milk) revolution requires a lot of cash inputs, they have to sell their products. So a lot of agriculture at present comprises non food crops. Cotton, sugar cane, tobacco and jute are traditional cash crops. New cash crops have been added like soya (oil cakes for cattle, mainly exported to Iran), and maize (mainly for poultry industry), flowers (mainly for export to cities) and special grass for feeding the milch cattle for supplying milk to the chilling plants of the milk federations. Area under crops, area under irrigation and total production has increased in a big way.

All this has generated enormous wealth and money in rural areas. This has led to consumerism which has increased expenses of rural people enormously. Rural people are trying to follow the role model of urban people-English medium education, motor cycles, smart phones, non local intoxicants. It has also created new problems, such as health-both physical and mental.

Green revolution poisons air, water and food. The use of toxic chemicals both at the farming level (spraying of pesticides) and breathing, drinking and eating them creates health problems. Increased mechanisation of agriculture and transport also have made people unhealthy and their medical expenses have gone up enormously. Stress due to debts leads to alcoholism, quarrels, depression and other mental health problems. Suicides are increasing due to debts and mental health issues.

Green revolution is also worsening the health of the soil and leading to a general ecological degradation of the rural areas. As the area under agriculture increases, area under forest and commons and grass land decreases. Excessive water consumption by crops has led to depletion of lakes and ground water to dangerous levels. Poor landless labourers suffer more because they depend on commons and forests partially.

Family ties are broken and individualisation has increased. Cooperation among villagers has decreased. Since the water below one's own land is considered a private property, a person digging a deeper bore well deprives neighbours their water. So tensions and quarrels, sometimes leading to violence, have increased.

The Solution to the Problems of Rural India

The solution lies in:

‘Rebuilding community and restoring ecology on the basis of equity and sustainability’

We define community as people living within one micro watershed, typically one panchayat or some 10,000 people. We have to consider the whole watershed and all its resources as collectively owned. Water is a common property and cannot belong to one person or farm.

The plan will have following components:

1. Awareness of the entire situation as described above.
2. Bringing together a group of young educated people around this awareness and plan for the village. Use the film on Hivre Bazar. This film tells the story of a village in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra where the village Panchayat is taken over by the youth and they turn the village green and prosperous. It is a dry land area and they manage to ban production of cane sugar and sale of land to outsiders.

3. Reducing expenditure in schooling, health, transport, communication, tobacco and alcohol. Also expenses in family and social and religious functions and pilgrimages. Encouraging use of local government school and government hospital.
4. Discourage green revolution, use of fertilisers and pesticides and gradually move towards organic farming methods. Plan the food requirement of the whole village- grains, dals, vegetables, fruits, eggs and poultry. Depending on the region it can also include fish and meat. Then plan crops for all the farms according to soil and water availability. Plan production of food-may be 25% more than required. Keep the production of cash crops to the minimum, say not more than 25% of the whole production.
5. All remaining land should be used for tree plantations. Commons should be preserved and if possible extended. Local forest should be preserved. Lakes and water bodies should be preserved and cleaned. Reduced use of bore well and increase water harvesting to maintain the water table.
6. Local people should contribute more towards local school, hospital, library, play grounds as all these are their collective resources.
7. You can plan the village nursery for trees in the school. That way children will learn about environment in a practical way. The school can also monitor pollution of lakes, keep a rainfall gauge etc. to monitor the actual environment. One can also plan the school as environment centre for the village with film shows in the evening.
8. Every home should have at least one bicycle, torch and radio.

How to do it

1. Now that we have some basic ideas as to how the future will look like in these 9 fields, we should conduct awareness programs about them through lecture, films, discussions etc. for about one year. We should concentrate on youth, particularly educated

youths from poorer sections of the society. We should work towards building a local leadership which understands these ideas and is committed to work for them. This group can be 7-10 individuals. Then this group should work on a concrete 10 year plan for transition.

2. One should create some kind of organisation around the school-like The Village (name of the village) Ecological Society. This should first start enumerating the ecosystem parameters of the village. They are: 1. Support land area 2. Cultivated area 3. Water production 4. Human population 5. Animal population 6. Food production 7. Milk production 8. Compost production 9. Consumption of dry leaves for animal bedding 10. Consumption of fodder 11. Fuelwood consumption 12. Water consumption (Domestic and animal).
3. Using this data one should produce a plan. The aim of the plan should be (a) local food security and (b) local energy security.

Food Security: We should produce local grains, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables and fruit for the requirement of the village population. Fruits have a special importance not only as nutrient, but also they come from trees which are ecologically important as they serve us, the soil, water conservation and support birds and insects. Animal protein should come mainly from fish, poultry and ducks. Fish and ducks are important because they also mean healthy water bodies which, like trees, are ecologically very important.

Energy Security: Although gas and biogas are convenient to use, they are not reliable sources. We have to depend on fuel wood, which come from trees.

4. So increasing trees and improving water sources are key elements of the plan. However cooperation among villagers and working collectively is equally important. Organising people around specific public works-like improving water bodies, tree plantations in degraded areas are priority areas.

5. In rural areas, the society is divided not only between rich and poor but also along caste lines. There are designated areas where different castes live. So in some way it is more difficult task. That is why we should pay special attention to educated youths, school teachers, health professionals and people who have someone in cities doing a job. A film like Hivre Bazaar illustrates this very nicely. But we can also work with MNREGA unions, fishermen's union and other such organisations in order to bring all the stake holders together.
6. Meanwhile individuals in the group can take initiatives in their personal lives and on their farms. They can start reducing expenses, send their children to local government school, use bicycles, reduce expenses on family and religious functions. On their farms they can start organic farming, create rain water harvesting structures, create small fish ponds and raise ducks and fish in them. This will give them motivation and energy to talk to others and create the village action plan.

In Conclusion

Human society is at a critical juncture in the history of our planet. The very survival of most life (including humans) on earth depends on what we humans do in the next 12 years or so. So in our own self interest we have to act on an emergency basis. The future of the coming generations depend on it. So it is all the more important for the young to act.

All of us have to move towards green jobs for our survival in the long term, whether we live in rural or urban areas. In fact, green jobs have more potential to generate employment than the present fossil fuel based economy. We need to reduce our needs immediately so that our requirement for income goes down and we get more time to devote to these tasks. Those of us who have the time and resources or fewer personal responsibilities can move in full time immediately. The time to act is now!

WE ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM

Ecological Degradation and Us

Usha Rao

This article explains why it is so difficult for us, particularly urban people to take the green path in our lives. There is a need to recognise this and move away from our present life, step by step to a greener alternative.

As we are organised today – economically, socially, politically and culturally-we are organised for greater and greater ecological destruction. There is no way that we can continue like this and still expect to leave the earth as a habitable place for the coming generations.

Economically and socially, we are constructed as individuals and familial economic units. These economic identities at the individual and family level are very debilitating for an ecologically sustainable existence. Economics dictates that we maximise our economic returns and practically every decision we make seems to be overwhelmingly governed by economic considerations only.

Socially we live in nuclear households and much of our life is determined and governed by it. This has drastically impoverished the quality of living. If there are many people of different age groups, different capacities, different interests, then life is richer and the load on each person is also less. Now each person is struggling and super busy all the time to keep a given set of things going. Our capacity to reach more people with what we can give and share is also reduced. Our access to good things that get generated by others' energies is cut off. There would be lots of time and energy and leisure if say the

number of households and establishments went down to twenty percent of what they are now. It is absurd that each nuclear household also keeps itself provided to host five or ten other people. So much of over-providing! And that at critical ecological costs, social costs and at the cost of a richer quality of life.

This pattern of life rules out the wholesomeness that will come by taking all aspects into consideration and with appropriate weightage. All our decisions are at the cost of well-being of larger society and like a vicious circle, our own well-being is also jeopardised.

The money we earn and the manner in which we get it is part of a system. In a society where inequity is increasing in huge proportions, obviously what we are getting is also what someone else is not getting. When having too much coexists with too much wanting, there is social pollution which poisons the existence of the haves and the have-nots alike. This poison cuts the possibility of any meaningful action. In a sense, whatever we have which is more than an equitable share of the world's wealth and goodies is poison contaminating a humane existence.

As civilisation has progressed, we have acquired a very negative attitude towards manual work. This is precisely what would have kept us healthy. So our own snooty choice of other work leaves us with no scope for a healthy existence at the personal, physical level and socially, it has corrupted the work culture.

Actually in a healthy society physical work will be seen as collectively meaningful and gratifying and it will generate well-being for all. It will include the joy of making something good. It would also mean something done together, that is; doing it collectively. For this, there is no pressure on the individual and our needs are met by joyous collective action. Much unlike our current jobs where each individual is isolated, this collective work also has a natural corollary in collective leisure. The kind of storytelling one has seen historically in folklore, folk dances, either does not happen in our current situation or happens in a very contrived fashion and does not flow naturally.

If we are doing something which is not part of an ecologically conserving culture, then every act of ours is ecologically destructive. In that sense, all the jobs we are doing, which are so important for

us, with which we identify ourselves, put our whole lives into and make a lot of money; if seen from an ecological perspective, are serious mistakes and some, perhaps, are criminal. Every bit that we are doing is adding so much to the already precarious situation that we are now facing.

There is something totally false about economics, in the sense that the way things are costed and valued are not in direct proportion to our well-being. Clean air and pure water are all critical for our well-being but individually or collectively, as a society, we do not invest any of our resources for this.

For example, our schools do not make us aware of water bodies around us, do not equip us to maintain our water table, do not train us to refrain from doing anything that will either degrade, destroy or pollute. They do not train us to monitor the pollution levels of our soil, our water, our air which should be imperative if we are to keep healthy.

If we mean to live as ecological citizens of the ecological web, then these are perhaps the first things that we need to learn; that a deep understanding of our ecology should inform every act of ours.

Over the years, land has become a commodity, which ends in the hands of the rich-the one who has more money. Since all of economics is skewed with irrationally high wages for some work and irrationally low wages for some other work; those who are buying land do not have the physical capacity or know-how to tend the land and those who have the physical capacity and know-how to tend the land are caught in the social pollution of aping consumerist lifestyles and take to mining the soil and polluting it with chemicals and pesticides in order to make big money, so that in turn they too can consume like the urban rich. In essence, we are organised in such a way that the land cannot be nourished and tended as it should be.

While land is being held with individuals and families and whatever tending happens within that paradigm, it doesn't make room for the truth that land, soil, water, biodiversity are commons and can be tended best only as such, that is, only as commons. Only when we tend these as commons, is when we look at each other as valuable human resource, essential to keep our collective well-being going.

As of now, we are divided very deeply into caste, class, gender, community, religion etc. All of it doesn't allow us to function with a sense of commons. It is indisputable that we can live ecologically only if we revel in being part of the collective web and feel the aptness of doing only that which will be good for everyone and also feel just as good about not doing anything which will detract from the collective well-being. There is a need to look at freedom in the sense of being free to be able to do just this.

Usha Rao (1961-) is an alumni of IRMA and is an organic farmer.

PICHHOUN TAAN (PULL FROM BEHIND)

This essay is addressed to young people who want to do some good for the society by joining political parties/NGOs/do social work on their own or do organic farming and such things. It is observed that they face and fear many constraints-pressure from family and peers to do mainstream work, earn a living and so on. Even after they overcome these initial pressures, they continue to face them, particularly when they get married and face a fresh set of relatives and expectations.

Essentially, they don't feel free to do what they want to do. They continue to face a 'pull from behind' or, as they say in Bengali, 'Pichhoun taan'. Many senior activists too felt this pressure when their children grew and had to change their earlier simple lifestyle. In turn, this acts as a pressure on the younger people.

What is freedom?

The dictionary defines freedom as: 1. the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants. 2. the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved.

Normally we think of the first meaning when we face external constraints. Hence there are political struggles for human rights, for freedom of speech and so on. Such freedom is focused on external factors. It is, of course, worth fighting for.

But there is another sense in which we can use the word freedom. It is the ability to say 'No'. This is entirely within our power and I think this is the way for us individuals to obtain space for what we want to do.

So where can we say 'No'?

As we said in the beginning, it starts with the pressure from family and peer groups. Why do we feel pressurised? That is because we are instilled with 'values'-of obeying/respecting our elders, and we are tied by material conditions-inheritance, of obligations of supporting parents and younger siblings when we grow up and so on. Family members, relatives and peer groups exert pressure on us to ensure we comply with these norms.

We can start by saying 'No' to inheritance. We can say 'Thank you very much for my education. But now I have grown up. I am an adult and I don't want anything from the family. Let it be there for others (sisters, younger siblings, old age savings for parents and so on).'

Secondly, 'Voluntary Simplicity'. The simplest way to understand this is to take a vow of not owning property, not to have a driving licence for any fossil fuel powered vehicle and generally to do with less money and try to live without a 'job'. This will give you a lot of freedom and also make you ineligible from the 'normal' marriage market. I think the only essential property worth having is a simple 'roadster' bicycle which costs around Rs. 5000/ today. You can maintain it for decades for a maximum budget of Rs. 500/- per year. It will also reduce your transport costs enormously and increase your mobility and freedom. Today a simple basic mobile phone (Rs. 1000/-) may be the other essential.

What Next?

Now you are free to do what you like. Explore various options near your town/city. Meet various people working in the alternative sectors. In many cases you will get food and accommodation free, in exchange for volunteering your time and energy. Meanwhile, evolve a plan for a year of travel and learning and finding out what you want to do. You will find it is not very expensive to do so, particularly if you stick to travel only by bicycle. You can do 50 km per day in comfort. You will learn a lot on the road. Don't worry about camping equipment, but do have a torch, a tube of Odomos and may be carry a light mosquito net and become an expert at hitching it up almost anywhere. Also, whenever you are in doubt about the quality of the water, try and stick to boiled water. In one year you will graduate to become a free person.

Some thoughts on what one's aims can be

Here are some general pointers that can apply to all of us. This has to be supplemented with individual aims and plans.

The present social/political/economic system has increased the inequality enormously through exploitation of people and natural resources. It has also degraded the earth, destroyed the community and has made majority of humans individualistic and money minded. So, the general aim/need today is to restore the degraded ecology through rebuilding community along with people's struggles for equality and saving natural resources. Our individual goals /actions should be part of such a world outlook. The general principles at an individual level can be:

1. To live a simple life/low carbon footprint life. Since metros and big cities are going to face collapse earlier, it is best to plan your future in smaller towns/villages etc.
2. To become an asset to the community on the basis of one's skills. It can be as simple as taking care of small children, taking

tutions, or running a library-cum-study centre. If you have technical skills-repairing equipment, health skills, etc., then that is also useful. If there is an organisation, then become a part of it, but at all times, relate with the community.

3. It is important to do physical labour so as to reduce the gap between intellectual and physical labour. Also, learning a physical skill gives a lot of happiness and confidence. More so if it relates to nature.

This is of course one person's view. It can be worded differently and parallel approaches are possible.

Relationship with existing family

You are on the road to build an alternative family based on the principle of 'a free association of free people'. This is where you will draw your social/psychological sustenance but this is not a given and it will take time for it to fall in place. Meanwhile you will retain contact with your family but it will be on a different footing-mainly on the basis of family bonds and not material needs. Also, hopefully, on the basis of equality and mutual respect, you will be able to resist pressure and still retain a good relationship. Give it a try!

Love and Relationships

How about relationship with a capital R? Where does it fit in our alternate family of 'a free association of free people'? Well to begin with, this alternative family is not a given. It is evolving both in history and in specific communes all over the world. Secondly it is based on mutual love, trust and a shared value system. For our purposes, this value system can be stated as 'restoring ecology through rebuilding community on the basis of equity and sustainability'.

Now love has a wide meaning, including love for children, nature etc. Here we are interested in the meaning of love associated with

sexual desire and reproduction. For the sake of simplicity of the argument we will be referring only to heterosexual love but we don't mean to exclude LGBT.

Now this relationship has also been evolving and today it exists in many forms-arranged marriage in a joint family, in a nuclear family, 'love marriage', live in relationships and casual relationships. In the alternative family also this has been evolving and we can expect all these variations. Only all of them will be residing in a 'joint' family of 'a free association of free people' where biological relatives-parents etc. may not be there. Like in the old joint families, children will be brought up collectively. Secondly, we hope that the value system of the mainstream society, including the idea of relationships derived from it-based on our family history, peer groups, the books and films we read and see and so on-will be weakened and they will not be the 'part of the problem'. And ultimately priorities will be-health, meaningful work, knowledge and then relationships.

NOTE TO READERS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

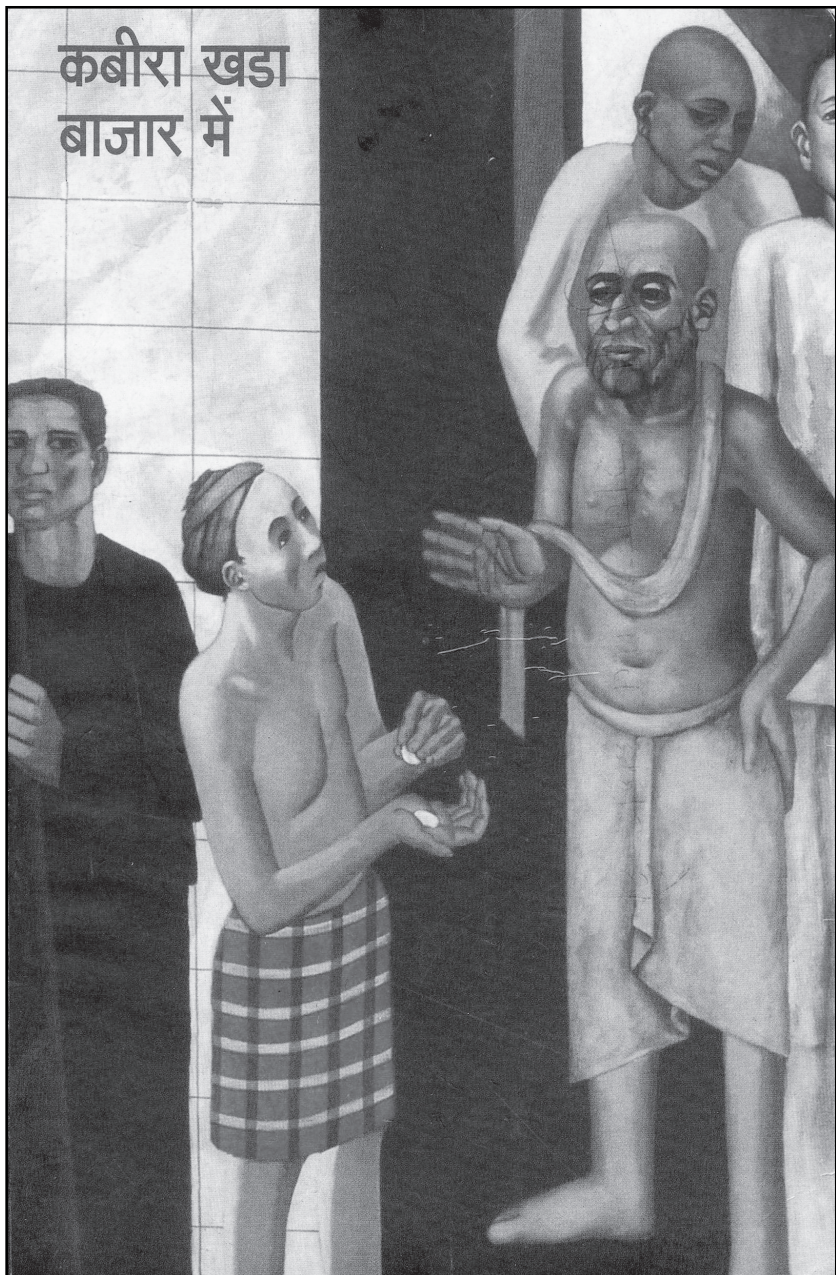
T. Vijayendra (1943-) was born in Mysore, grew in Indore and went to IIT Kharagpur to get a B. Tech. in Electronics (1966). After a year's stint at the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kolkata, he got drawn into the whirlwind times of the late 60s. Since then, he has always been some kind of political-social activist. His brief for himself is the education of Left wing cadres and so he almost exclusively publishes in the Left wing journal *Frontier*, published from Kolkata. For the last ten years, he has been active in the field of 'Peak Oil' and is a founder member of Peak Oil India and Ecologise. Since 2015 he has been involved in Ecologise! Camps and in 2016 he initiated Ecologise Hyderabad. In 2017 he dedicated a year to celebrate bicentenary of the bicycle under the auspices of Ecologise Hyderabad. This year he has organised workshop, 'Guide for the perplexed', for young people. He divides his time between the Ecologise group of organic farms, Hyderabad and writing. He has published a book dealing with resource depletion, three books of essays, two collections of short stories, a novella, an autobiography and a children's science fiction story on the bicycle. All the publications are Copy Left and are available for free download from the SCRIBD website.

ABOUT THE BOOK

This little booklet addressed to young people, is a call for action in the wake of global emergency. It is a call to them to involve themselves full time in meeting this emergency. The prevalent discussion and action on global warming, is largely about the nature and urgency of the problem, making a protest and call on governments to take action. This booklet on the other hand focuses on Local Action by local groups. It also gives the logic of local action and reasons why this has been neglected.

The main body of the booklet describes the nature of the global emergency, the need for local action, definition of 'local' and of local action, local action in urban areas and local action in rural areas. This is followed by two smaller articles. The first one, 'We are part of the problem', answers the questions as to why most people, in spite of knowing such a lot about these issues, are unable to act at a local level. Then, 'Pichhoun Taan or pull from Behind' describes the pressures from home and peer group that prevents people from getting into revolutionary action. It also gives a guide to action in such cases.

कबीरा खड़ा
बाजार में



Artist: Sudbir Patwardhan